

Ezra 3:1-6 - David Baumgartner

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[0:00] We welcome you to the media ministry of Bethel Community Church, knowing Jesus, making Jesus known. We're going to continue our study in Ezra. So if you have your Bibles or your phone app for your Bible, please turn with me to Ezra chapter 3.

We're going to be looking at verses 1 to 6 this morning. This book began with a decree from King Cyrus. Where he gave the Jewish people permission to return to their homeland and to rebuild their temple.

And this would be after 70 years of captivity in Babylon. Last week we saw in verse 64, we read that some 42,360 brave souls made that difficult trip.

And they resettled the cities of Palestine now, which would be including the capital Jerusalem. And this morning's passage is going to take us to the next very important step.

And that's to reestablish the worship of their God, Yahweh. Let's go ahead and read this morning. Ezra chapter 3, verses 1 to 6.

[1:19] Now when the seventh month came, and the sons of Israel were in the cities, the people gathered together as one man to Jerusalem. Then Joshua, the son of Jezokak, and his brothers and priests, and Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtel, and his brothers arose and built the altar of God of Israel to offer burnt offerings on it, as it is written in the law of Moses, the man of God.

So they set up the altar on its foundation, for they were terrified because of the peoples of the lands. And they offered burnt offerings on it to the Lord, burnt offerings morning and evening. And they celebrated the Feast of Booths, as it is written, and offered the fixed number of burnt offerings daily according to the ordinance as each day required.

And afterwards, there was a continual burnt offering, also for the new moons and for all the fixed festivals of the Lord that were consecrated, and from everyone who offered a freewill offering to the Lord.

From the first day of the seventh month, they began to offer burnt offerings to the Lord. But the foundation of the temple of the Lord had not been laid.

[2:39] Heavenly Father, we are so grateful that we can come here today to be able to worship you, Lord, for just all the blessings of knowing you and who you are, Lord.

Lord, we see here in our text all these sacrifices. What does that mean for us today? How can we glean from these verses?

Lord, we pray that through the power of your Spirit, these verses would come alive to us this morning. Because we depend on you, Lord. We depend on your goodness, your graciousness, and that great sacrifice that you did for us.

Thank you, Lord, in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. You guys ever heard of the Buddy Jesus? You remember that? Buddy Jesus?

I used to know this young man. Actually, I was friends of his parents, and he had developed brain cancer. And so I had this opportunity to talk with him several times, and I got to share the gospel with him.

[3:50] One day I came to him, and he's all smiles. He's got brain cancer. He's all smiles. And he was talking to me about his buddy Jesus.

And he actually gave me a VHS tape of this movie. It's called Dogma. I don't recommend it to anyone. But it was put together by some people back in 1999 on the premise that the cross of

Jesus is actually rather depressing.

Would you agree with that? Yeah. The cross is depressing. And what Jesus needed was an image campaign. And so they created Buddy Jesus.

There's a statue of him. He's going like this, and he's pointing up. And there's also later they upgraded that to a bobblehead that you could put on your dashboard.

What's wrong with Buddy Jesus? I was sitting there listening to this, and I'm scratching my head, and I'm asking myself, what can I affirm about this that's good?

[4:58] I mean, I came out of an organized religion where actually Jesus was not my buddy. And so this, in a way, sounded refreshing. But watching the movie, it was just full of irreverent slogans and things about Jesus.

And I got to thinking, what is wrong with this? I'll tell you what's missing. It's not that Jesus isn't our friend, our Savior, our brother.

What was missing is the information that's behind the whole sacrificial system and how Jesus fulfilled it. Yes, Jesus is my buddy, I guess in a loose sense of the word.

But he's also my Savior. And I would hope that he's your Savior too. You know, because we do need to ask these questions. How can we approach an entirely awesome, all-holy, all-powerful God when we ourselves are sinners?

It's a good question. That's a question that you may ask coworkers or maybe people in your family. How can we approach a holy, awesome God like that? Now, we could wait for our retreat that's coming up because I know the topic is going to be the path to worship.

[6:22] And so hopefully we'll learn some many good things there. But this morning, we see here that the Old Testament here in Ezra does provide us with this look into this very important thing.

And this morning, I'd like for us to briefly look at the small part of the Old Testament worship system and the sacrifices and these special days.

And then just look at how this applies to us. I think in many ways, as I was thinking about this, it seems more like a Sunday school session.

And I don't mean for it to be that. But, you know, just going through much of this does seem like Sunday school. But more importantly, I hope that it conveys just the importance of our, first of all, worshipping God.

But secondly, who Jesus is and how he enables us to do that. Now, we don't sacrifice animals anymore. But there are patterns and principles that we can see here.

[7:24] Let's look at our text here. Go back in verse 1. It begins. Oh, yeah, thanks. I'm so excited just with the worship here that I just forget those things.

Anyway, while that's being handed out, look with me in verse 1 in your Bibles here. It is said here that now when the seventh month came and the sons of Israel were in the cities, the people gathered together as one man to Jerusalem.

Notice here our text begins with these Jewish exiles now settled in the various cities of Palestine.

And verse 1 tells us that when the seventh month arrived, all of them traveled to Jerusalem.

Now, I know that most of us are not familiar with the Old Testament calendar. So we might want to begin by asking this question. What's so special about the seventh month in Israel's calendar?

Well, to answer that, every Israelite would know that the seventh month is one of the most special and sacred months in their entire calendar. According to the law of Moses, three of their seven holy days were observed on the seventh month.

[8:51] And that seventh month is called Tishri on the Jewish calendar. I'd like to just, if you want to follow along on your handout here, just to give you briefly what we're talking about.

First, what's celebrated on the month of Tishri is the Feast of Trumpets. Now, this is a one-day feast, and it takes place on the first day of the seventh month.

Tishri means turn of the season. And so in ancient Israel, their yearly calendar was based on agricultural observations. And so this would actually be their New Year celebration, beginning right after the harvest.

To observe this holy day, it called for first all laborious work to cease. There would be a blowing of the trumpets at the exact time when there was only a slight view of the new crescent moon.

They would blow their trumpets. And then third, there would be animal sacrifice. Look with me, it's on your handout there, Numbers 29, verses 2 and 5. It says, You shall offer a burnt offering as a soothing aroma to the Lord, one bull, one ram, and seven male lambs, one year old, without defect. [10:08] And offer one male goat for a sin offering to make atonement for you. So that's the first thing. Also on the seventh month, there was the Day of Atonement.

Now, this was their most solemn day of the year. In fact, it said that you shall humble your souls and prevent an offering to the Lord by fire.

Observance of this holy day, the Day of Atonement, called for all laborious work to cease. There would be animal sacrifices similar to above. Plus, on this day and this day only, on the Day of Atonement, that's the day that the high priest would go into the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle or the temple and would stand before the presence of God's glory in the Ark of the Covenant and he would sprinkle blood on the mercy seat.

But you should think of that name, mercy seat. Ark of the Covenant, God's glory. Third, and also on the seventh month, there would be the Feast of Tabernacles or what's called here the Feast of Booths.

This feast would begin on the 15th day of the seventh month. And this feast would last for seven days, plus there would be an extra day for what's called sacred assembly.

[11:30] And this celebration commemorated the way that God provided for the children of Israel during their wilderness journey under Moses from Egypt.

It coincided with the ripening of grapes, figs, and olives. And so it was very fitting that they'd celebrated at this time. And observance of this feast called for all laborious work to cease.

Secondly, there was a detailed schedule of animal sacrifice for each day. The priest would offer, basically it was a gradual decline for each day.

The first day would be 13 bulls. The second day, 12 bulls. Third day, 11 bulls. By the time you got down to the eighth day, it was just one bull. But in addition to that, people were commanded to reenact their exodus days by living in tents for seven days.

Look with me. Here's a verse in Leviticus 23:40. It's on your handout. And you shall take on the first day of, this is of those seven days, the fruit of the splendid trees, branches of palm trees, and boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook.

[12:43] And you shall rejoice before the Lord your God seven days. You shall dwell in booths for seven days. All native Israelites shall dwell in booths. And here's why.

That your generations may know that I made the people of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt. I am the Lord your God. Just a couple of points about these three feasts here.

These feasts were, it's important to know, these feasts were established by God himself. In fact, they belonged to him. Also, these ceremonial laws, they're very demanding, and they're very specific.

I just touched the surface about what was required. Each of these days required an animal sacrifice. And to do that, you need an altar.

Isn't that right? Look with me, verse 2. Then Jeshua, the son of Jezodak, and his brothers, the priests, and Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, and his brothers arose and built an altar of God of Israel to offer burnt offerings on it, as written.

[13:57] These two main guys were already singled out in chapter 2. And they're going to become very important as we continue in the coming chapters. Jeshua is a descendant of the priesthood, and then Zerubbabel is a descendant of King David.

So, verse 3. What do they do? They set up an altar on its foundation. This here is important because the location of the altar was very important.

It had to be rebuilt on the original site of Mount Moriah, where Abraham was told to offer up Isaac. And then later, this is where Solomon had built his temple in his time.

Verse 3 continues, And they offered burnt offerings on it to the Lord. Burnt offerings. Notice, morning and evening. This term here, burnt offerings, you realize it's mentioned six times in six

verses.

So, I thought it's kind of important just to look at it. Burnt offerings was the main sacrifice in the Old Testament. It required an animal from the herd or a flock without blemish or defect.

[15:07] The animal would be brought in before the entrance of the holy place. And the worshiper, the owner of the animal, would lay his hand on the head of the animal.

And that was to signify that that animal was serving as his substitute. And that animal would then be killed. And then the priest would collect some of the blood for sprinkling.

The animal would be skinned. It would be butchered. And parts of the animal would be washed.

And then the whole animal would be burned. No one ate any of it.

It all went to the Lord. Verse 4. They celebrated the Feast of Booths, or Tabernacles, as it is written.

And they offered, notice, fixed number of burnt offerings according to the ordinance.

Each day required. That's that detailed schedule I was talking about. Verse 5. And afterwards, there was continual burnt offerings. Also for new moons. For all the fixed festivals of the Lord that were consecrated.

[16:08] And from everyone who offered a free will offering to the Lord.

Boy, lots of offerings. You get the picture? What it must have been like?

There was a continual burnt offering as well in verse 3. Morning, evening, new moons, sacrifices.

Also there's mentioned free will offerings offered voluntarily by the worshiper.

All this means that now they had to have a fire burning continuously. Day and night. Day and night.

And that's because Leviticus stipulates that the fire on the altar must never go out.

Secondly, think about what was required on the priest's part. All this took a lot of work. A lot of dedication. And so we come to verse 6.

Which is kind of like a summary statement. Their sacrificial system is now in place. Leave that with me. From the first day of the seventh month, they began to offer burnt offerings to the Lord.

[17:11] But notice it goes on that the foundation, it says, but the foundation of the temple of the Lord had not been laid. I think this was most likely, this was added for two reasons.

One, it's to prepare us for the next big event. Which is the laying of the temple foundation. But also, I think it tells us that their system of worship was still lacking.

In other words, they're unable to perform all of the sacrifices that required purification of the holy place. Because since there's no temple foundation, there's no holy place to be purified.

Also, even after they performed all those animal sacrifices for the Feast of Booths, apparently they did not actually live in booths for seven days as required.

This is something I picked up in our study in Nehemiah. Look with me in that verse. In Nehemiah chapter 8. Now, this is 90 years after Ezra.

[18:18] You got that? Notice what it says. The entire assembly of those who had returned from captivity made booths and lived in them.

But get this. The sons of Israel had indeed not done so from the days of Joshua, the son of Nun, to that day. And then it says there was great rejoicing.

It's kind of interesting. A partial observation of this important thing here. Whatever the case, these returning exiles are now worshipping God.

Amen. I'd really like to see how can we apply this text this morning? What can we learn? Well, the first one is this. Just very simple.

The importance of worship. Notice here, the first order of business was to restore their system of worship.

[19:21] It was so important that all of them came to Jerusalem. Verse 1 tells us the people gathered together as one man. This tells us that the people were unified.

It tells us that they were not forced to do this. Rather, they gathered together on their own volition. And I think there's very good reasons for this.

And I think you'll agree with me with this. First reason. They didn't want to repeat the past. They learned from their past mistakes when they turned away from God.

We saw this in Nehemiah again. David, last week, when he was talking about this very same book here, he described the differences between the Israelites who came out of Egypt and then these

Israelites here in this group.

And he described it in terms of the numbers and the money, you know, their prosperity. And boy, what a loss, wasn't it?

[20:24] When you think about just the consequence of sin and rebellion, you know, many times those consequences are still there. And God lets us go through that.

A second reason. Not only do they not want to go through what they did again. A second reason, verse 3 in our text introduces another motivation, which is going to be kind of new here.

Notice, fear of the people. Verse 3 tells us they were terrified because of the peoples of the land. This term, peoples of the land, that occurs five times in this book.

And you might want to ask, who are they? Well, these are Jews who did not go to Babylon. They were actually left behind during the exile some 70 years ago.

But here's the thing. They didn't stay pure. They intermarried with the heathen nations. And as we'll see, they are now going to become enemies of these Israelites.

[21:38] They will be known as the Samaritans because their capital was in Samaria. And I'll tell you what. Future chapters regarding this group, it's going to get really ugly.

So don't miss that. And the other thing, if you have enemies, isn't it good to be on God's side? I would say so. So that's the second reason. First, they don't want to repeat the past.

Secondly, the motive of fear. Thirdly, a third reason for gathering, simply to worship God. Amen. Worship God.

Worship means giving God what is due to him. It actually comes from that word, worship, which means by his very nature.

He's worthy of our worship. He's worthy for who he is. Psalm 145, the psalmist says, Great is the Lord and highly to be praised.

[22:37] His greatness is unsearchable. I think we sing some songs about that. Secondly, not only is our worship in regards to who he is, but we also worship out of a response for what he's done for us.

We remember, we proclaim, we celebrate his saving deeds. I just think about how our country was founded on biblical principles, which actually seem like we're kind of losing a lot of it today.

I'll tell you what, friends, brothers, sisters, regardless of the mood of this country or of society, worship needs to be a priority for us, both individually and corporately.

You know, I'm going to ask you, what worship songs are most meaningful to you? Just think about that. Our singing is not just a warm-up, you know, for looking at the message.

The Lord is looking for those who would worship him. Jesus said in John 4, An hour is coming, and now is, when true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth.

[23:52] For such people the Father seeks to be his worshipers. But get this, worship is not just our singing. It's not.

It's to include all that we do. Paul says in Romans 12, verse 1, I urge you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living, holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.

So that's what we get. It's just the importance of worshiping God. But here's another thing I think that we can take away from this. Even under the best circumstances, the Old Testament ceremonial laws were inadequate.

They were. The sacrifices, the offerings, the holy days, they all deal with how sinful people can approach God.

And friends, God has not changed. He hasn't. You may have noticed, though, that we don't have an altar here. We don't have a fire, not because of Webster Groves, but we don't have a fire.

[25:08] We don't have any high priests walking around. Hebrew, the writer of Hebrews in chapter 10 tells us, The law, look with me here. The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming, not the realities themselves.

For this reason, it can never, by the same sacrifices, repeatedly, endlessly, year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship.

This tells us here that all of these ceremonies, it's just a shadow of something better to come. And that's because it will look forward to a day when the true payment will be made by Jesus. In chapter 9, the writer of Hebrews says, speaking of Jesus, He entered once and for all into the holy place, not by means of the blood of goats and calves, but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.

Isn't that great that Jesus would do that for us? You know, this is so fitting for what comes afterwards when we celebrate the Lord's Supper together.

[26:21] If I can invite the musicians, come forward. I'd like to cover this last thing here. Jesus fulfilled all the requirements of the law. He's the high priest.

He's the atoning sacrifice. Paul says in Romans 8, For what the law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, as an offering for sin.

He condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.

One of the illustrations I like is that the law is like a credit card. You know, think of a credit card. It's plastic. There's really no intrinsic value in a credit card.

But it's accepted in many places. I think most places. Instead of cash. And that's, you can kind of think of that credit card as a shadow of the true payment, which is to follow.

[27:29] Until that time when the card, until that time the card covers that debt. And that's when Jesus, the true payment, paid the debt in full.

Now and forever. It's a good question. Are we covered by the blood of Jesus? Do we trust in Jesus? That's what it really means.

The laws, Exodus, Deuteronomy, deals with how sinful people can approach God. You know, there's going to be a prayer meeting today.

I hope that most of you can stay for it. But it brings up a question. When we pray, how are we able to come into God's presence? Because he's holy.

And we're not. We don't study animal sacrifices anymore. All that much. Which is why we're in this book. Sometimes you will hear people say, God has changed.

[28:31] Have you ever heard that? Yeah, they'll say that in the Old Testament, God was just full of wrath. But then in the New Testament, he's full of, he's just easygoing, full of love.

In fact, he's my buddy Jesus. My buddy Jesus. Friends, God has not changed. We are sinners separated from a holy God.

And we still need cleansing and forgiveness from sacrifice. To really know Jesus, like we say we do, or say what we want to, we must see him in the Old Testament.

And that's because the New Testament describes who he is and what he did through the lens of the Old Testament.

Especially the sacrifices. Look at all of these things we saw. The principle of substitution. The principle of blood given in place of a life.

[29:33] Blood being sprinkled on the mercy seat. Purity requirements for the animals. Holiness requirements for the priests. And all of this is fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Friends, that's what comes. Not a buddy Jesus. But knowing who Jesus is and what he did.

This last verse here, just to conclude. Since, therefore, we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus.

By a new and living way, which he inaugurated for us through the veil that is his flesh. And since we have a great high priest over the house of God, let us draw near.

Let us draw near when we worship him on Sundays. Let us draw near to him when we're worshipping him in our car. Let us draw near to him when we're praying together after this service here.

[30:39] Let us draw near with sincere hearts. Full of assurance of faith. Having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience. And our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope

without wavering.

For he who promised is faithful. We trust in Jesus. We place our faith in him.

That's what it means to place our faith in Jesus. It's because of who he is. And what he's done.

What a great God we have.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. ■ generating music. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Love. Amen. Amen.

[31:36] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.